

"Holland and the World at the Dawn of 2008"



Encouraging The Reflective Citizen

Part 1. THE SHARING OF PREOCCUPATIONS AND EXPERIENCES

During this part of the Listening Post, the participants were invited to share the experiences they had in their various social roles: as an employee, manager or employer; as a pensioner, writer or as a member of a political or religious organization, as a neighbour or a volunteer, as a member of a family or a community. This part mainly focussed on 'the events in everyday life', which are related to the social or external world of the participant.

Part 2. IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES

The objective of the second part was to name and describe the main themes arising from part 1. The most discussed themes are listed and described below:

1. The economical strait-jacket in which we are all stuck was mentioned a lot. The jobs demand more and more and without noticing we sacrifice a lot of our time and energy for it. Almost desperately the participants see that their own children surrender to the consumer society. They worry about this. The participants have also noticed that they themselves gather consumer goods, without getting more content. The participants are worried about the production needs of China and India. Who is going to pay and can our European economy keep up with this? The word 'crisis' is used several times.
2. The subject 'connecting' was mentioned multiple times. It is getting more difficult to keep the link between the generations intact. At the same time, examples in which this is not a problem are mentioned. Relationships between different groups in society cause despair when we see that people cannot or do not wish to understand each other. People isolate themselves and appear to not need each other any longer. The products and services provided increase the possibility of individualisation.
3. The flow of information is overwhelming. It approaches left and right, and all has a certain amount of accuracy. But what is the truth? The possibility of exploitation by the media; newspapers, television and the internet is seen as a real danger. The participants find it difficult to make their own opinion: "I am feeling more and more lost in this world" said a participant. Information coming from experts, like doctors and teachers is increasingly distrusted. The relationship between customer and service providers hardens.

Part 3. ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION

In this part of the Listening Post, based on parts 1 and 2, the participants collectively try and name the currently underlying conscious or subconscious dynamics of what goes on

in the world and to come to hypotheses in relation to what is happening right now. At this point the participants are more involved in what you could call 'the internal world'. On the one hand their collective ideas and thoughts determine how they experience the external reality and on the other hand they determine their actions towards that external world. Through the discussion, we came to this:

Analysis and Hypothesis 1

Analysis: The participants feel captured in a forced economical world with a remorseless and unstoppable production process. Grow, grow, grow is the most dominant sound in that world.

Worry for the needs of people in less developed economies comes into existence. Exhaustion of natural resources, pollution is seen as a real thread. Another thing that causes anxiety is the contesting power of these countries (China and India). 'Can our economy equal theirs?' and 'where will we earn our money?' are questions asked in this context. People watch, with feelings of powerlessness, self-reproach and disappointment, how their own children take their place as consumer of large amounts, without any problem. Not many people agree with the statement that some children do understand boundaries. The word 'crisis' is used multiple times: "it drives me crazy; my life is going to be bothered and I see it coming". One participant said: "We are running into a precipice with our eyes opened". To change this situation, violence cannot be ruled out: 'we might not survive'. It must be stopped, but in what way is unclear. We are looking for people to take the initiative, but can not find them. The politics scatter. People are confronted with their own wishes and needs, they only want to sacrifice them if everyone else will, or if someone with power decides it is not allowed any longer. They feel addicted to products; and are fascinated themselves by thinking efficiently in their own work and living environment. Besides this is their health threatened and do they not see an option of dealing with this differently.

Hypothesis: The thought that the current world economy makes live unhealthy and unbearable, creates feelings of uselessness, powerlessness and insecurity. The quality of life decreases continuously. People lose things which were valuable to them once. The participants feel like their existence is threatened and they can't do anything to stop it. Their positive self image is under pressure, because of their own consuming attitude. Cynicism is just around the corner. The fantasy that mainly other people have to solve this problem arises. Or maybe one person, who controls, forbids and tells us how to do things. Someone who is in charge.

Analysis and Hypothesis 2

Analysis: The participants find that the possibility of connecting with people decreases. The Listening Post characterizes what the participants believe connecting is; Time to share and understand each other.

Connecting problems are felt in both the personal atmosphere between (grand) parents and children 'I just don't understand those children'; 'I don't know what interests them anymore', and in society: 'as a teacher I tried to tell the children that 'shalom' and 'salam' have similar meaning, and in no time the children were engaged in unfruitful discussion with each other'. Another example is the preparation of the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in, The Hague: "suddenly you're intensely debating with African people about the validity of this declaration, because it is a Western product".

God seems to return into the social domain, in which everybody creates their own religious cocktail. At the same time initiatives are taken, by young and old people, to stay connected using new communication technology (MSN, Skype). Parents find ways to communicate with their children, which are not familiar to the 'older users', but experienced as meaningful. The amount of positive meetings between people with different cultural backgrounds increases, and we are interested in each other's past. Fear of the loss of identity continues to be an issue, because of which we find it difficult to see the person behind a statement and to see the 'good' of their criticism. The little attention offered to a successful collaboration is limited and stops the developments of more initiatives.

Hypothesis: At present time making contact means encountering 'devastating' differences; differences in culture; religion, behaviour; lifestyle, time management, interests. Meeting people makes it necessary to invest time and energy into each other. Opposite responses are seen: some isolate themselves (flight) and some confront those issues and other people (fight). In this last case, the old behaviour patterns and old ways of communication are not sufficient; learning new behaviour and new ways of communication takes a lot of effort, but has to happen. Positive attention to successful developments in this area will encourage new initiatives.

Analysis and Hypothesis 3

Analysis: We live in a time, in which the amount of information increases exponentially. Not just the factual information, but also information which tries to describe our 'reality', the world around us. If something is 'true' or 'not true', 'good' or 'not good', keeps getting harder to distinguish. Someone said: "in the morning I read someone's opinion and I think, yes, that is true, in the evening news someone states the exact opposite and I agree with that too". The information that is seen as contradictory or unreliable does not help the individual to orientate in this world, and to define their place in it: 'I don't know it anymore, should I buy biological fuel or not? what fish can I eat? it makes me desperate; I feel like a little dot in this world more and more'. But also: 'to whom should I be loyal? with what in the world can and should I connect myself?'

These threats of identity seem to turn against experts like doctors and teachers, but also the relationships with other service providers become less pleasant. In these contacts people seem to want to get their confidence (back), they do not want to be the lesser one. They find information via their personal network and internet, before they, loaded with information, approach an expert. These meetings often end in distasteful quarrels and most of the times in the end of the relationship. Contradictory, the cry for information does not decrease. Being informed seems, very short, to go together with 'belonging somewhere', 'not being alone'.

Hypothesis: Information is important to people to orientate in the world, to give them a feeling of being someone, having control over something, belonging somewhere, to some group; to enable the possibility of setting goals. The inability and sometimes the unwillingness to select from a large amount of information creates overburden and stress and a feeling of being nothing. These feelings have an increasing negative influence on relationships with several experts, whose task it is to advice and support. In some people this also causes the tendency to isolate from society.

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